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FEEDING AND CARING FOR SQUIRRELS

Prepared in the Section of Fur Resources
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Squirrels are hardy creatures. They can resist cold and storm if they have good nests, and there is no need of sheltering their cages by roofs or board walls. They do, however, require some protection from the sun. This may be supplied by placing the cages where they will be partially shaded by trees during the middle of the day, or a section of each cage may be covered with boards. Gray squirrels have been reared successfully in captivity, and there is no reason why other kinds can not be propagated if their needs are properly attended to.

Food

The food of squirrels in the wild state includes, according to the time of year, nuts, corn and other seeds, buds, mushrooms, insects, and fleshy fruits. In feeding caged squirrels, their natural supplies should not be forgotten, but a standard menu may well consist of corn, sunflower seeds, and nuts, with some green food now and then. It is particularly essential that they be given regularly some hard-shelled nuts, such as hickory nuts, black walnuts, or butternuts, to keep their ever-growing incisor teeth firm in their sockets and properly worn down.

Cages and Nests

Squirrels should be kept in outdoor cages, about 10 or 12 feet square and 10 feet high, the walls and roof covered with heavy 1-inch-mesh poultry or similar netting. The walls should extend down into the earth 10 or 12 inches to prevent the animals from digging their way out. It is advisable to set two or three small trees in the dirt floor of each cage. Weather-proof nest boxes, placed high and filled with an ample quantity of leaves, bast, or other warm fibrous materials, are indispensable.

During the breeding season only one pair of squirrels should be kept in each cage. At all times there should be a separate shelter, or sleeping box, for each squirrel, the boxes being placed in different parts of the cage. Having these boxes separate is necessary because of the pugnacity of some squirrels, particularly of females caring for young.

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Care and Sanitation

In the care of squirrels there are a few points that need scrupulous attention. Their quarters should be kept clean and sweet. Their nest boxes should be cleaned out occasionally in good weather and fresh nest material supplied. To keep the floor of the cage from becoming foul, it should be cleaned at regular intervals and the earth stirred to the depth of an inch with an iron rake. Water dishes, preferably of earthenware or glazed ironware, should be washed daily and never allowed to stand in the sun while in use.

